

## Active Shooter Procedures for Libraries

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<https://infopeople.org/civicrm/event/info%3Fid%3D624%26reset%3D1>

# Active Shooter Policies in Libraries | ALA Annual 2016

By [Stephanie Sendaula](#)



*“How many of you would be prepared to handle an active shooter in your library? How many of you have an active shooter policy?”* Few hands were raised when BreAnne Meier from the North Dakota State Library asked these relevant questions at the Active Shooter Policies in Libraries Program at the American Library Association (ALA)’s recent Annual Conference in Orlando, FL. Meier described active shooter situations as ones where someone is actively engaged in killing, has access to a confined area or population, and is sometimes motivated by revenge. As a result, she explained, these situations are unpredictable and can change quickly, often lasting for such a short time as ten to 15 minutes.

The recent mass shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando lent tragic immediacy to the topic as Meier explained what librarians should and should not do—and how to ensure the safety of library patrons—if faced with an active shooter. In sharing the policy at the North Dakota State Library, she advised librarians to either run; hide; or as a last resort, fight. If you can’t run, hide. Find an office. Close a door. Push a desk against a door. If you have to fight, don’t fight fair, advised Meier. Use a fire extinguisher, if necessary. But, be sure to commit to whatever you decide to do.

### THE TAKEAWAYS

While this entire session was informative, there were four significant takeaways:

- Turn off your cell phone. If that isn't an option for whatever reason, put it on silent as opposed to vibrate. If you text someone for help and they respond, the shooter could hear the notification on your phone.
- Do not hit the fire alarm as it would cause everyone to evacuate and thus become easy targets. Some librarians in the audience asked about duress or panic buttons located on or near a circulation or reference desk. These are okay as they often call the police directly, without requiring everyone to evacuate.
- Do not move or help injured people as this could make you more of a target.
- Do not post your active shooter policy on your library's website. You don't want this information to be made public where a potential shooter could plan around it.

When it is safe, call the police and give them as much information as possible. If you aren't near a phone, press the duress or panic button if available. Meier also shared helpful tips on what to do when the police arrive:

Keep your hands visible at all times. Follow all directions. Do not make any sudden movements. Don't ask questions. Remain as calm as possible.

### Have a disaster plan

Meier recommended that active shooter policies should be part of library's emergency or disaster plan, and that training should occur on a regular schedule. The policy should have plans for communication, evacuation, a gathering place, and a lockdown area. Focus on areas that are hard to secure, keeping in mind any possible hiding places or escape routes. Most importantly, she added, always know your two nearest exits. Staff roles and responsibilities should also be included in the policy, along with instructions on where to take patrons.

The question of where to take patrons or what to do when patrons don't want to leave the library was raised by listeners. The advice? Follow your disaster plan as closely as possible anyway. Some academic librarians in the audience had already experienced active shooters, either on their campus or at the library itself. They shared their stories, giving others in the audience, along with Meier, additional tips on how to try to remain calm and help patrons in a stressful situation. All agreed that a well-trained and coordinate staff is essential to protecting both staff and patrons.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Meier recommended the video "[Surviving an Active Shooter](#)" by the LA County Sheriff.
- Others in the audience recommended the [Department of Homeland Security](#)

- The [U.S. Navy](#) also has helpful information